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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 140908Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0536
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2467
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0383
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHHMUNB/JIATF WEST PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS KUALA LUMPUR 000095

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: ELECTION DAY SET FOR MARCH 8

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 90 - ELECTION PRIMER

¶1. (U) One day after Prime Minister Abdullah announced the dissolution of Parliament and set the election process in motion (reftel), Malaysia's Election Commission (EC) announced on February 14 that it has set Election Day for Saturday, March 8. The EC also set February 24 as the date for nominating candidates. Afterward, all candidates have three days in which to request their names be removed from the ballot should they decide not to accept the nomination. The campaign period will run from February 25 through March 17. The 13-day campaign period is the longest allowed since the 6th General Election of 1982 when the parties were given 14 days to campaign. In the 2004 national election, the campaign period lasted only seven days.

¶2. (U) Also on February 14, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi chaired the ruling coalition's executive council meeting at the United Malay's National Organization (UMNO) headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. National Front (Barisan Nasional / BN) component party leaders met to finalize the coalition's list of candidates and confirm seat distributions among the 14 component parties. The parties are expected to release their candidate lists in the next two to three days. The local press also reported that UMNO's Supreme Council was scheduled to meet on February 14 to discuss the party's preparations for the elections.

¶3. (SBU) Former Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the People's Justice Party (PKR) Anwar Ibrahim lambasted Abdullah's dissolution of parliament as "shameful" and argued in a press conference on February 13 that the only reason Abdullah would dissolve Parliament when it held 90 percent of the seats was to exclude Anwar from contesting the election (see reftel). Anwar argued that a lack of access to the media and fraud in Malaysia's voter lists created neither free nor fair elections. None of the mainstream newspapers or television stations reported Anwar's criticism, and all gave very short shrift to statements from opposition parties. The Democratic Action Party (DAP), PKR and the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) all used the online media to release the messages regarding the start of the election cycle. The loosely allied opposition parties boasted that negotiations over seat allocations were nearly complete and promised that in almost all cases the races would see only one opposition candidate in order to avoid "three cornered fights" with BN candidates.

KEITH